POETRY QUARTERLY

edited by Wrey Gardiner
and published by The Grey Walls Press
7 Crown Passage, Pall Mall

VOLUME 11, NO. 1, SPRING 1949

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL *page* 3
J. R. HERVEY: *The Dancer and the Prophet* 4
KENDRICK SMITHYMAN: *The Memorial* 6
WERNER ASPENSTROM: *Level Ground for the Impossible City* 7
GUNNAR BJORLING 8
JOHN SINGER: *Nightsong* 9
DEREK STANFORD: *The Golden Lull* 10
CLIFFORD DYMENT: *Savage the Daylight and annihilate Night* 12
This is not My Country 12
DORIAN COOKE: *Poem on returning to England after Six Years' Absence* 13
Poem at Xmas Time 15
NICHOLAS MOORE: *The Violation of Harx Farkastrue* .. 17
JAMES KIRKUP: *The Seeds* 18
DAVID WRIGHT: *Valedictory Lyrics* 18
ROLAND GANT: *These Wounds Lie Deep* 20
NORMAN NICHOLSON: *John Keats to Fanny Brawne* 22
HARDIMAN SCOTT: *Strindberg* 22
CLIVE SANSOM: *'Keeper' Mourns Emily* 23

N. K. CRUICKSHANK: *The Parson's Daughters* page 24
ERIC NIXON: *Spindrift* 25
CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON: *Trilogy at the Top of the House of the Unborn* 26
MARGARET CROSLAND: *The Statues* 28
IRIS BIRTWISTLE: *Paintings at an Exhibition: Chagall* 29
GLORIA KOMAI: *Sight, Startled Stag . . .* 29
HAZEL ROGERS: *The Watchman* 30
MARION COLEMAN: *Poem* 31
Myself Is All I Have 31
IGNACE M. INGIANNI: *Poem* 32
EDWIN BROCK: *Soliloquy* 33
Lament 34
Poem 34
GEOFFREY WAGNER: *Waves* 35
WALFORD MORGAN: *The Unseen Footsteps* 36
ERIK DE MAUNY: *The Poetry of G. S. Fraser* 37
B. EVAN OWEN: *The Significant in Poetry* 43
REVIEWS 48

After Every Green Thing

A Selection of Poems

by

DANNIE ABSE

The poems are remarkable for real inspiration and sometimes startling expression and will make a strong appeal to lovers of modern poetry

5/-

HUTCHINSON

largest of book publishers

EDITORIAL

In the few years since the end of the war poetry seemed to have suffered a partial eclipse. Nobody was writing anything exciting. Only the perennial flood of dreary academic pastiche never ceased to flow. The professionals—those who must write as long as they are alive—kept on, of course, but disappointingly one felt. But in these last few months there are some slight indications of a turning of the tide. Poets who had disappeared in the cataclysm of the war are turning up again—and writing. The quality of MSS sent in is rising. There seems, as somebody said before, a hope for poetry. But not from the sales point of view. The publication of volumes of verse is quite definitely now a publisher's expensive luxury. Not that it has not always been so for the last fifty years with the exception of the short periods of the two wars. It has never been exactly determined why the very large poetry reading public of the nineteenth century dwindled away to an insignificant minority in our time. Useless to sneer that nobody can understand modern poetry for all kinds of verse are being written and published. A great deal of it could have been written fifty years ago. Perhaps indeed it is that very ossification of the academic mind that undiscriminating readers still associate with poetry which inclines them to believe it to be a stuffed museum piece from a dead world. But the history of literature still provides us with material for hope. Nothing is more illuminating than the minute editions in which some of the greatest of our poets first came before the public. The changing tastes of succeeding generations is an enigma that can never with any accuracy be resolved.

In this issue we print two translations from the Swedish of Gunnar Björling and Werner Aspenstrom. Gunnar Björling belongs to the Swedish minority in Finland and is generally considered one of the foremost modern poets in the Swedish language. This is the first time he appears in an English translation. We also print two New Zealand poets, J. R. Hervey and Kendrick Smithyman, the latter already known to our readers.

J. R. HERVEY

The Dancer and the Prophet

She whirls in a storm of praise
In this the sultry hour of her dominion,
Beauty, possessive as the sun,
And these the dazed minds
Caught in the loop of loveliness.

All words desert
the brain groping for speech,
For this starry thing burns away all utterance,
And loads the time with an intolerable treasure

Who can make a song to follow
That glittering flight,
Limited by no leash,
Sobered by no presage,
Scattering laughters among the ascetic tombs?

To her, yesterday is not,
And to-morrow, even now walking,
Is an unheeded threat—
How shall she from the reckless music
Hear the studied approach of the stranger?

She is the darling of time,
The quivering priestess under the arch of days,
But she does not see
Time putting off his reassuring disguise,
And on the appointed night
The murderer at the last milestone.

Cool in her confident dream
she knows nothing of
One lurking beyond the lure of her effulgence,
The dark-browed exile
Who from his god-haunted rocks

Sees the dancer ringed by the wrathful fire—
Sees her like a sun-blessed wave
Die in a dishonour of scum.

For this is the man approved who from his tower
Of prescience sees the casual
Disaster fall from the dallying god
On the swaying adoration of the flesh.

And from a Voice more secret than the heart,
Knows of the bright-eyed bird
The least touch of whose feathers
Delivers the infection of death.

The dancer, along the blazing highway,
Could not discover the place
Where her heart was hidden—
Could not find
The self in its dreadful hermitage.

But he, having torn the corrupting raiment
And beneath the charming cerecloth
Having found himself
found also
The revealing solitude in which the rocks
Arranged themselves into an altar releasing
Perpetual waters.

And falling at last under the smile of death
He persevered towards the highest peak
Yet still lived in a word which ran
Like spring about the winter-famished pastures.

From LANDFALL, New Zealand

KENDRICK SMITHYMAN

The Memorial

Aerial boy who dives clouds between
hint of danger and the lustrous praise
cold as a fish in my gaze on the town
where your commerce hardens arteries:
you rise above the factories and yards
a bronze sympathy, a dour reminder.

The lightnings which embrace your finger
our passions are, marking your riding
eye worn blind to the heavenly angers.
O blind to the torn gale of passions
schoolmen wear from their books and backs
turning from you, your untired enterprise
aware of, bend unremarkable to your love.

That love unremarked terrifies the blind
whom cloud-scrambled sky forfend dealing
not dangers down now but worse, admitted
dispassionate angers. Or loveless to suffer
these under your sword go accepting each
dropped card to fill no hand on a dry deal.

In the month of torrent the equine light
nags at their elbow.
But you ride up
on the glow of suffering, change weathers
cloud diving through and the cages are
not made will hold but the thunder bars
ring only out of a metal the mouth sings
wind missionary. To-day, the wry garden.

WERNER ASPENSTROM

Level Ground for the Impossible City

The lost is lost
the beaches close
over rivers that ran by
abandoned roads
sink in the sand
ascended mountains
drift away like smoke
into a thin rain
crumble our victories

No ringing bells for the dead
instead let the wind
the wind or the windlessness
crush these last shells
memories and possessions
consumed shoes
thrown on the fire
consumed foundations
thrown on the fire
even the ruins
must before morrow
turn completely into ruins

Level ground for the impossible city
here can no longer anyone
be separated from the other
but that which I address to you
is not a command
because there are columns
that only slowly fall

I do not sell promises
I do not sow distrust
I speak for no man
I belong to no advance guard
I belong to no rear guard

I only proclaim
that something is lost

I state the conditions for an impossible city

From 'Utsikt'
Stockholm
Translated from Swedish by Stephen Bergman

GUNNAR BJORLING

translated from the original Swedish by Marjorie Gerhardi

Shadows in the Sand

I

Quiet summer among the trees
and by the shore, without stars
without wave or wind
and all is
all for a moment
all that was, and will become
and is—
a bird calls
a light moves over the waters
the hidden light of a moon
the silence of a song
the shadow of an island's silhouette
—I am as near the light
as is the light of flowers in the dark lands
of the graves.

II

It is not the woods, the waters, not graves nor earth
nor death.
It is the silences of smiling people, it is the sorrow of
the old upon all shores.
It is the dirge of the unconsolable, the last watch together
with the bloom of life in the mouths of
the young dead.
That the waves swept gently.

JOHN SINGER

Nightsong

He sings but one song, a song of night, a nightsong.
Each light he sees is separate, wrapped in its own mystery,
Each comfortless star, finally alone, as in the beginning,
Cold in its own history.

Night's resolution, the remotest pole
From morning's arrogance; now separateness is frozen
With midnight landscape in the early year.
Now, carefully, appropriate balm is chosen.

Oh, but the wilderness, the wilderness, the green and
brown fury,
The uninvited rank and lush and wildly beautiful,
Claws into the city vertically, laying siege
To nightsong and nightpsalm and nightprayer dutiful.

And to the pacing heart, ragged beneath its polish,
King-emperor images of wild dominion
And warm infinity; then spoiling winds disturb
And shout a contrary opinion.

Oh, small with relegation and with loss,
He makes a nightsong of the shuttered city.
His hope, renewal from a hidden seed,
And green beginning born in more than pity.

DEREK STANFORD

The Golden Lull

For JOHN BATE and DAVID WEST

'C'est l'automne, l'automne, l'automne,
Le grand vent et toute sa séquelle!'
—Jules Laforgue

The blood-red flowers flare in a pool on the lawn;
the river below the high-road hints at winter
(hushed willows calm as glass-green icicles,
late sunlight snared in water's cobweb trap).

Already the iron-work tables are folded up,
the fountain has ceased to pluck its mandolin,
each odd deck-chair a ship marooned in stillness,
chalk-scrawl that tells the caféteria closed.

In the suspension of twilight colours are keyed
to the plangent pastel mauve of the Michaelmas daisy.
The flaming eyes of flowers are filmed with mist;
and grief's grey kerchief waves in the hazy air.

Come away now. Regret needs no inducement.
We have stood, heads bowed, too often at summer's pyre;
eyes blinded by the glare of bright geraniums,
while a bonfire idly smoked its pipe of peace.

Ironic image! Vain all such tranquil fancies:
the blue mesmeric vapour of fallen leaves,
slowly consumed in flame's delaying smoulder,
evokes, to-day, far other reveries . . .
Come, then, my friends; it is time we were gone
from these gardens.

In small hotels and cafés tea-cups rattle,
and, to the lucky, toast comes steaming hot.
Too early yet for the butter-luscious muffin:
too late, alas, for summer's rainbow fruit.

Thence, where these kitchen-comforts cheer the spirit,
let us procure such dainty consolation
as money, taste, and these wry times permit;
and let each summon forth those liberal talents
which, formally, accorded with our feasts
(wit, grace, and charm that now seem non-existent,
dispersed or atrophied by breath of war).

Rouse up, my masters; inbred thoughts devour us,
and premonition wastes our brief reprieve.
Call out the mind's bejewelled dancing-girls,
for Rome, untutored, once more begs to burn.

One last look at the terrace. Old and worn,
the ravaged satyr of the lily-pond,
whose stone-locked limbs no naiads may pursue—
type of those many frustrate lusts we knew—
chill dusk obliterates your tired form.
Farewell, grey gardens; soon the silvering moon
shall yield you back such moiety of beauty
as flowers possess through faintly-misted glass
or naked flesh in some close-curtained room.

And now, down lamp-illumined alley-ways,
small children play their stringed horse-chestnut game,
intent on victory as we hurry past them,
and sealed, like us, within their separate dream . . .
Cold from the river grips our ungloved fingers
as if its wave crept through these streets unseen.

CLIFFORD DYMENT

'Savage the Daylight and annihilate Night'

Savage the daylight and annihilate night
Anger in me that rises to destroy
Not evil only, which is a common thing,
But good also: such public shame is sweet.
Yes, sweet I say in defiance of the saints
Timorously peeping from the safe house
Of religious platitude and political honour:
Sweet is the violence without compassion,
Heroic the hand that chokes the holy flame.

Oh, man is huge over the little world,
Darkening it with pride. The darkness falls
Unfailingly, and forever, and all this folly
Of grandeur so surely fatal angers me
Till I call to the heavens for the redeeming shock
Of a rage that ravishes even the angels.

'This is not My Country'

This is not my country, these hills bald
Like the heads of wrinkled brown old men, these lakes
Vapid as daughters sheltered from the world
Hating their placid home and longing
For the stranger wind to come raging through the pass
And lash them to life with terror and love.

No, I repeat, as I climb the slope
And look at the craggy landscape where the soil
Scrapes a living like dirt under the finger nails
And only the hardiest crop, the northern bread,
Has the heart to dance in the air.
No, as I surprise the sheep
Nagged by the wind and tottering always away

From the wind's rancour into a rock's charity
To crop a poorhouse herbage thin as gruel—
No, this is not my country, the stony cell,
The coarse dreary garment, the pulse and water
Of a faith so frail that wine and wildfowl,
Sensual peach and bejewelled silk
Work its downfall in a swift sweet foray.

Faith of that kind, that can only resist
Temptation that is not present, I abhor,
And keep my praise for those whose faith
Is constantly tried and constantly true,
Who are not afraid to confront the richness
Of orchards and farmyards, of arable curved
Like a brown dress on the earth's swollen womb,
Who give and are given so abundantly
They do not need to hoard their meagre possession.

DORIAN COOKE

Poem
on returning to England after Six Years' Absence

What would be best
Of the remembered of living or dead
To call from multiple-wounded, hidden places?
Or the high after-crest
Of an earthquake may suddenly spread
More masonry on skulls and living faces.

Not of my choice
Are the shapes that ride on visible sound,
—My seven loud brothers buried overseas,
The warm, green, gentle voice
Of my seven sisters underground
And music tangled in the roots of trees.

Somewhere I dare
To scour uprooted woods and scratch my hands
Among the war-picked ruins that still mark

These towns, to tease and tear
Thick scabs from unremembered lands
And smash the stone slabs that shut out the dark.

It would be best
Of the forgotten of the dark and light
To make a peculiar identity;
And from the locked, deep chest
Of the forbidden of sound and sight
To excavate its guardian enemy.

Who could forget
The pain gained in the lost years, in the waste
Times between killing and dying? This pain
Remains and moves to fret
The coupled strings of touch and taste
And prick the coloured bubbles of the brain.

Again, to make
Of warring fissions one identity
Is a kind of destruction,—as the waves
Of an explosion break
Sound, flesh, and stone, and the shocked sky
Shakes with the emptying of its guarded graves.
And of the last
Who have remained are those who are worn strange,
Who watch, without welcome or grief, a cold
Room in a hanging past
(As in a mirror blind to change)
With their own living and dead and the unknown old.

There we who are
The exact last comers of the first gone
Are seen only as shapes that file and fall
Between the near and far
Dead or sit with the living like iron
Shadows between the window and the wall.

Who now remembers
Of the last or first of numberless dead

The new ways or the old ways? And who will dare
To walk back six Decembers
And dig the mud of that dark bed
To the roots of these Summer wounds we bear?

They all go down,
Drowned in their visions, who would live again
Across these ruined landscapes where huge seas
From some still standing town
Have swept the ground of grass and grain,
Have lopped the limbs and bent the trunks of trees.

So there is still
The inevitable answer: there is no
Time to return along the loaded days
That lead under the hill
Where wind and blood and water flow
Into the vortex of an endless maze.

Somewhere I must
Unmake the shadow substance of these hosts
Whose hands beyond the shut-out dark invade
Like magnets in the dust.
Their world ends; and all its masks and ghosts
Must crumble as the separate visions fade.

Poem at Xmas Time

(for my birthday)

Somewhere an echo burns
Out of the winter dark.
Is it a stranger's face?
Is it a human mark
Stamped in an alien place?
Or a voice that returns?

Find folklore in the sky
Where right and wrong are sold!
Conjure December rain
If all the roads are cold!

I shall not ask again
Till body and ghost run dry.

Six years of stunted flame
Strike the resonant night.
Lost landmarks from the earth
Make bird-cries in their flight.
Add twenty-three years from birth
Before the bloodshed came!

O, who would go again
Down to a scavenged shore
To share with sky and sea
The fragile, cherished straw
Of his identity,
—Like gold from a rare beast's mane?

Somewhere an echo dies
Down the unworthy years,
Damp words that plague has blown
Like an old man's bestial prayers.
That's where the dead went down
With burnt or bleeding eyes.

Cover those eyes with mud
Lest they corrupt the light!
Let me forget the songs
Of Angels in the night.
The years like many gongs
Are screaming through my blood.

NICHOLAS MOORE

The Violation of Harx Farkastrue

It is my death I see in a black moustache
And in the horny hands
Of a vain engineer, and the marbled bosom
Of untrue Venus.

Love in love-in-death, and the whips
Of scorpion demands,
And the black X of a wicked woman's
Weakness between us,

My Vera's face in the looking-glass, the wax
Image of viscid sands
And caught siftings of a play inhuman
In every scene. As

The crumpled bodies of war rise up, my death
Remains, the wedding bands
Themselves become the final bond with treason.
My sullied queen has

Made for herself a throne famous from which
Her lily throat commands
Dark servitors, and me casts out to Onan's
Hopeless allegiance.

And that is all. Death owns a black moustache
And holds in hairy hands
The soft white breasts of a stolen bosom,
A stone-cold Venus.

JAMES KIRKUP

The Seeds

These tree-packed hearts
That in my hand
Now rootless roll
May in my eyes
Less briefly lie,
My visions now
Make real then
For other, deeper skies.

Their own air waits,
Sun, frost and rain
And winds to shake
Fresh seeds from skies
Where birds will peck
Leaf-holes for blue.
You all contain:
Life, light—death's heart and eyes!

DAVID WRIGHT

Valedictory Lyrics

I

The silence I break
In anger of delight
Is resurruction at the door,
Is burial of fire,

As the moon on the sea
Winding furious hair
Pulls from the rocking glass
The face in love with death.

II

All night within her cage of tides,
And folded in her shifting care,
The crumble of my granite is
At rest. Whose arms about me are
Sleeps unconflicting with the snows.

She takes the morning to her breast,
As trivial as my falling fears.
The coffin burning to the east
Demands me. And commanding tears
Lock up my cabinet of loss.

III

Were silence breaking on her tongue
To rise immortal at her ear
The drowner's tumult, or his love
Not measured by a blazing oar,
The splendid irons from his arm
Would jangle to the dragon floor.
But O she took leave of her lover
With clashing gongs and conches blowing,
Like a tall admiral.

IV

Veined shaking fingers reach
To a violence felt
For the image in the eyes,
As barren valiant
The anger I disguise,
Asmodeus of the bride.

Retract upon the tide
What disturbs the lying quiet
Heart. The seven candles lighted
For the unresurrected
Husbands of the virgin die
Guttering in a lover's eye.

Reach neither hand nor spirit
Over distance or time,
Or raise, on waters riding,
A white chariot,
Let ghost and body lie
Nightly in quiet.

ROLAND GANT

These Wounds Lie Deep

'Ja est co Rollant, ki tant vos soelt amer,
Par nule guise ne m'aviez desfiet'.

These wounds lie deep and silent
more, one would say, like inward corrosion
which leaves no telltale mark upon the skin
but, growing ever stronger, lacerates
the tissue wherein it coils.
Like a child too large for birth
it can only thrust and writhe
to self-destruction in spasmodic pain.
Easier far to meet the sudden smart
of flesh that opens like a rose
to receive the probing steel
and never hides the trail it cuts.
I am the surgeon and the sufferer
I am the loved and the lover
cutting knife and shrinking flesh
the proud wounds of love permit no opiate.

I made a running noose of words
in which to catch your heart
and cast it first between stone walls
on bright mornings of early summer
casually at first, as one might throw
a line upon the water with intent
to pass the time and nothing more.

And then, with full design, I set
the snare and waited until I felt
the desperate twisting of the struggling prey
It was my heart that felt the noose
myself that struggled to be free
and tighter, ever tighter drew
this circle for another planned.

They journeyed far, your heart and mine
on earth they played the appointed duel
of indifferent jealousy and evasion.
But in their realm they voyaged free
of our minds, our wills, our plans and hopes
between the earth and the stars they met,
ignoring us who long were parted,
and down the corridors of dreams
long hollow echoes sounded which woke the one
and lulled the other's fevered fear.

> O love that escaped—yet knew no bonds
> love without possession that yet was mine
> love that is lost and was never found.

So we come to wander, you and I,
in this autumn city, this strange land
of silent streets ringing to our words.
This solitude trails strands which bind us
close together and your voice, your hand
casually touching mine sends once more
a singing magic to explore and soothe
those hidden wounds which you inflicted
long ago on a night when tears moved you
to a pity which hurt more than denial.
Which is the solitude, which the reality
in this quiet place between white churches
whose walls remain like the hulks
of ships long pounded by the sea.
Weeds soften the scars of the city
but no green grows in the ruined
aisles of the heart. We talk, you and I,
but no seeds are planted, no flowers can bloom
in the bitter wound that lies between us.

NORMAN NICHOLSON

John Keats to Fanny Brawne

Dearest, unfaithful now am I,
For with another love I lie—
A planet-eyed and peering wraith
Who breathes on me the breath of death.

Her lips are dry as sawdust, yet
Wet as a rag I lie in sweat;
Lie weak for sleep but cannot rest,
Her hot arms clamped about my chest.

And if one night I slept with you
She would lie there between us two,
And when I'd tongued the blight of bliss
Your mouth soon she'd seek to kiss.

For her hermaphroditic wine
Could heat your blood as well as mine,
Could teach you what I learned of life,
And take your widowhood to wife.

Therefore, beloved, let me go
Into the bright Italian snow,
And dig a mattress one rib wide
To hold my ballad and my bride.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

Strindberg

Who, like youth, were never your own master,
Never unmanacled the slave of love,
Driven by a hundred lashes of hate
And God's necessity, neither pastor
Nor sinner, were like a prism, the mauve
And the white shattered by light into fate.

And the scattered fragments lay flickering
In trembling colours, like eyes you stared out,
The light, like all, recurring, but always
Watching the heart's abyss, never holding
A single stationary moment to rout
Disordered colours to the prism's gaze.

Yet light shines up from the open tomb,
And a bud on the castle breaks in bloom.

CLIVE SANSOM

'Keeper' Mourns Emily

Her quick shoe startles a stone from the churchyard
path,
Or fires a board across the midnight floor;
Her walking-voice is summoning toward sun,
Her movings puzzle behind the shut room.

Weight of her hand is pressure on head and ear
As I watch the fire-play in the long parlour;
Her skirts and the windgrass brush along one flank
As the moor lopes with me through unhappy twilight.

Returned, her smell still haunts the kitchen meatbowl,
Fastens to workbox, carpet, empty clothes.
Nowhere but hear-feel-scent encounters her.
The house is hers, all hers—and she is gone.

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

The Parson's Daughters

I

The wind moans round the graves these winter nights,
While the friend's re-read letter makes it plain
The sounds of the world are somewhere, and the sights.
Her letters dig fresh talons in the wound.
The schoolmaster in Europe never writes;

Nobody calls; one hardly ever speaks;
The days are a shuffling line of elephants,
Also the unfaceable weeks;
The nights, coming on and on and on, are birds
Of prey with bright eyes, high and mighty beaks.

II

He was out each stormy night, the wild rider,
The hard, proud man with the queer look of guilt,
Galloping steadily on moorland roads,
Dark-cloaked, his thumb crooked on a dagger's hilt.

He spurred and galloped while a scudding moon
Tore blackness from bare hill, from drear lake water;
Reached home at dawn, and stabled in the head
Of the parson's middle, oddest, most silent daughter.

Papa in his high stock praising her bread
Had no idea; nor had the sisters, nor
The brother; nor the simple curate
Entering the room she left by another door.

III

I with my shyness, my depression, tears,
Timidity and asthma, was not one
To thrive on tempests; but I did have the strength,
When the storms raged, to say 'Thy will be done';

To breathe 'So be it' as the dissolute blast
Smashed the faint blossom, broke the lupin stalk,
Or when I first knew it was only Death
Crossing the sands to meet me on that walk.

I reminded the Saviour of his green
Pastures and gentle rod; early one morning
Looked up and saw my praying hands were dyed
With the mad splendour of the shepherd's warning.

ERIC NIXON

Spindrift

The spindrift lace-cloud weaves
the sea of sky
like April white the trees
or the winter spirits of water
mapping their cities on the window panes.

Hear too, the tremulous hidden birds
into the aeriel interspaces
expanding music
elusive as mirrors of water
littered by a receding sea.

Now the high wind drifts his loom
shredded and nebulous
as an arrow-headed tide
over the spiritual blue far curve of heaven
spinning spirals of cloud
suspended between ocean and sky.

I see these wind-shaped angels and chariots
white as falling snow
wheel and fall, rise and turn
their arabesques marvellous as music dreamed,
silver as the fields of music.

So spindrift whispers on the long wide shore
its echoes of the sky above
volatile as vapour,
bubbling on the bony pebbles.
The small waves speak
of the voices of birds lost in the sea
or breathe how time has cleaned
their bones to pebbles white as clouds
safe in fathomless nests.

O water-cloud, sky-flung spindrift,
they merge and echo all days
where sky and ocean
meet in dream-clear beauty
displaying their wind and water-shaped purity
to salve the human heart.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

Trilogy at the Top of the House

Of the Unborn

Where is the door they say
Is open for travellers
Once in one month only
Where is the door I open
On other nights and out of dreams
Beyond this honey world beyond
The vigil, curled up, to be born?

I see through it
As an eye sees through the thin
Heart's film a diamond
A one-eyed woman and a queen
Sits sighing among the liquid counterpanes
And is the limit of my odyssey.
For the key is in her prison.

The door is quiet and closed
Whispering of all birth and mother
But here as virginal and all
As girl and wife remain.
And so my word is brushed
By unborn hands and the mysterious logic
Of a labyrinth spun out of a trance and is
The joker's solitary gesticulation.

II

Hands these gestures overhead
Little hands bent in pity, feathers
Which rise in the still wind and settle
On birds and pink-skinned shells:

These penetrate me and become
My dance before the child audience,
All blue boys and girls in chairs
And hide at night in rosy sepulchres.

Trees take them in and warm
Not me, in the cold tomb I spin
A music of unborn gestures,
A spirit lost without a master.

Lady, among the ruins and deserts,
Do not pass over me now or turn
Your veiled and tender head away,
But touch as by our miracle this witness

Hands in their drowned gestures
Bent in your own wish, my memory
Which coils within and there awaits
Your love and their release.

III

The high tent in the sun
The house with a locked door
These are the genesis the hill

I climb towards the rope.
Do not hang! A world of faces,
Abyss, alarm, and fear in eyes
Not mine nor of another man:
The man who is all faces.

Walk out, lion, victim, become
The target of terror's kiss, the hands
Which fix this endless equator
Determine this vertigo I spin
Alone on quiet and terrible heights
And weave the acrobatics of an anger
Until the needles break limits and point
The paths of suns, the territories of angels.

MARGARET CROSLAND

The Statues

In London now,
the white roofs blind against the sky,
statues are glum unmoving councillors,
knowing their swords frozen, assuming
an empire of plane, acceptance of calm
when generals die.

In Europe now
Wenceslas, distant Lenin, the Mermaid
in the harbour, their snowy silence
answers the glimmering question-face.
'I did not see that huge Liberty',
the soldier said.

How still they wait,
nymphs and gods on the palace, how
motionless the lions. But nothing
so still as our stone voice, not even
the white roofs blind against the sky,
in London now.

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Paintings at an Exhibition: Chagall

For ANGELA

See how his girl of flame snuffs
The cold prayers of a symmetrical rabbi
As she rides through fields of flowers

And unsophisticated faces
Bestride a buckled cow.
See how she shelters the bewildered

Cock whose feathers are milk teeth
Gnashing primitive winds which blow
From America, Russia and Paris.

GLORIA KOMAI

Sight, Startled Stag . . .

Sight, startled stag; report of scarlet leaves;
Steel blue pool shot with silver; can time, stopped,
Go on, in place?
Dank auburn scent a pang
To angels (agents, influences)? From
Their side of crystal say of men: 'As such
We were'?
When most resembling (rose arrived
At fragrant limits, leans upon itself),
Do they come nearer (surely smiling)? More
To frost than dazzle? Why the difference
Except bright eyes search, take in lovingly?

HAZEL ROGERS

The Watchman

The metal mouth sounding
Its unsatisfying call
Has sent homeward, with tired sighs,
The pale figures, each overall
Drawn tighter. The narrower eyes
Seeking a way in the darkened streets.

Slowly the silence of the mill
Gives courage to the clicking
Of a hundred crickets.
The clock, that with silent ticking,
Had taken the hourly wickets
Of the day, now speaks aloud.

Between the rows of looms,
His torch turning back the nervous clan
Of shadows, as they haunt his way,
Comes the mill's night watchman.
The night making the day
In which he lives alone.

Each waiting hour those shadows
Move before the whitened arc;
Each hour, the clock and night
Chatterers quieten as the dark
Is stolen by the watchman's rite
Of heedful seeking.

And then the longer hour finds him
(His crippled leg making
Companionship with the crippled wall)
Marking each traveller forsaking
An early bed, and to call
A friendly recognition of the time.

MARION COLEMAN

Poem

Now still
and passive stand,
dropping all active will:
so at the centre one may be
of sense, and passion, and reality.
In the warm room, the sun upon my face and hand
falls through frost-leaved windows; sound and
movement stir and spill,
shake the loaded air, as wind a ruined, bare tree.
In being, for all emotion here to fill—
none alien, good to evil spanned—
self void, I feel, and see;
not understand;
am still.

'Myself Is All I Have'

Myself is all I have; shall I not prize
my only warrant for reality?
these hands, lips, eyes,
all the habiliments that my soul disguise,
hair shirt, and panoply,
and strange, fierce robe of mortal ecstasy?

Not least the dark stream, flowing down the years,
that troubles, and enriches, blood and bone,
that drenched my youth with fears.
What dreams, and longings, and what bitter tears,
petrified, stone by stone
have built the cell wherein I lie alone!

Only the earthquake, rumbling underground,
can lay my shelter open to the sky;
the sorrow-heavy sound
of wind among the ruins, and high-wound
harsh note, and panic cry
of stricken creatures desperate to fly.

these break my silence: shaken now, and cold,
stark and uncouth under the stars I stand,
as hermits who of old
fled from the world, and found temptation hold,
so I myself had banned
from common use, but kept the common brand.

Now am I humbled, falling to that state
nothing is left, myself my only store;
as far from being great
as finity from Godhead; so my fate
depends on me no more,
conformed at last to the eternal law.

IGNACE M. INGIANNI

It all fits together
the trail of shed skins, the fluid interplay
of primal wonder, between two beginnings
in a mounting curve, risk and equilibrium.

The crags' adventure, battalions
of pulsing dust driven from the warm centre,
the tissue torn, angry laws that presage
metal boldness, days hanging on labour.

Across our skies no sign but the wind of words
brimming with loose wild rain
and the down-fall of pillars.

Our rhythm in time is the hammer of chaos.
Compulsion grows infinite, tight-fisted
in the candle of hours.
The bewildered dead slink
into the paradise of the tomb.

EDWIN BROCK

Soliloquy

I stand behind the wings
Waiting for my cue
Wondering what part
I'm going to play

No words are in my mind
Not the first word
Of my opening speech
Only a humming tension
And discords from below

Shall I dance out lightly
Ignoring the upturned faces
Lose myself in the woodwind's murmur
Create my being in the awful energy
Of this moment's heartbeat?

Or stride slowly to the spotlight's glare
Pause, and throw my sound among the crowd
Sinuously determined searching
For one responsive ear
To hear his cry
Among the herd's derision?

When the call comes
I shall know clearly
As if no other course had been
Oh but at this moment
I am standing behind the wings
Waving my hands
Trying to keep the damned spinet working.

Lament

These words I hold so carefully
To drop upon this patient stone
Have held my head in coolness
Allowed my fist to loosen
Pulled the torment from my eyes

Words with which I know and cannot
Know because I know

Breathe the soul again
Between these jagged fangs which serve
To grind my meat and spit my life
Before the men
Who weigh and judge and cast away

We've read these lines before
Tasted this torment yesterday

Poem

I have lived in my solitary cave with pity
And in my eyes has leaped
The light, the flickering fire

I have shaded with you
Beneath love's tree
And faced again the future's wind

Through you my streets have warmed
Windows are not empty
And women move more softly in your words

Holding tightly to this precious thread
Which pulls across our days
The silence of an opened heart

And I have seen again a gate
An entrance to an island
Surf's rush becomes the pauses

Which we place before our lines
Now in this long day of an endless winter
I warm my frost-numbed fingers at your name.

GEOFFREY WAGNER

Waves

the waves bold boys create their ecstasies with
whom the moon is wan when they plough
their gleaming tides beneath her breasts

they cling to waves whose rudders whitely drip
awaiting the period of each tide the first
flood under the navel of the moon

those groaning bellies and sped flanks erase
our mysteries wipe clean the dead assuage
the mortal sting that sticks there still

the waves bring out our men and drench
their flowerdrunk dreams and throw them
back again the waves are strong

but these clinging forms so soon forget the masts
the dice of bones beneath the swell those hunted
men seek out their hunter in a moonward sea

and open mouths cry out small teeth
as white as foam and truceflecked eyes whilst
undine peace moans in Silenus' heaving flesh

the waves shout out and throw them back
they hurl their pictures crowded white against
an everlasting shore beneath a liquid sky

diurnal tides dripping of the moon full
vistas of shipwrecked bells forsake our ecstasies
where the flood fails and is seen to die

WALFORD MORGAN

The Unseen Footsteps

All those who have discovered with Cézanne
the blue feathers of the cypress
discoverers
who have sailed on journeys
their rigging honeycombed with blue ice
these
and do not forget
the fragility of porcelain the blue drifts of snow
and all the corners of language
where truth congregates
songs heaped mussell-shells Taurus the signs of the
Zodiac and all ancient buildings ravaged
by a flickering firelight or

Spring whose imagined sweetness
returns only to the heart
these
and under your scrutiny place the lonely
stranger whose smile gave you thoughts of marriage
but who vanishes

all these bringing gifts that open landscapes
to your message hold tenderly
like wafers of mist in the palms of your hands
whose days of sufferings
masques pageants are corybantic hours that are marked
by notations of music
dazzle with sunlight
with bright potentialities the colour of irises
probe the secret desires of the young and speechless

and the unaccountability of sudden Freudian
wishes like deep pools edged with darkness
in the heart
cannot fail to find symbolic footsteps mysterious
and illogical always treading towards poetry—
leading our eyes to infinity—

but that always stop at the corners of language.

THE POETRY OF G. S. FRASER

A SCOTSMAN who lives in London and likes it, an exile with a strong sense of 'home', a Protestant with an intuitive response to ritual, a romantic with a devotion to form—in any approach to the work of G. S. Fraser, a number of such contradictions and semi-paradoxes are bound to spring to mind. And the reason lies deeper than that one once deprecatingly put forward by the poet himself: 'I seem to exist by a series of improvizations'. In the whole field of contemporary English poetry, Fraser is remarkable for the sinewy intellectual content of his work: and it is not inflating his worth to describe him as the most shrewd and thoughtful of his poetic generation, an intellectual leader in that he expresses better than most the modern intellectual's alert uneasiness in a world of conflicting loyalties and continues the precarious tradition of a dispassionate search after truth. If he sometimes seems to slip into contradiction, it must be remembered that he comes of an ancient, shrewd and disputatious race, who have long enjoyed a private communications system with their Maker.

As I have suggested, there are a number of possible approaches to Fraser's work, and a number of tangled clues: but perhaps the best way to unravel them is to proceed by the simple chronological order. In that way, the nature and development of Fraser's intellectual preoccupations may be shown, which is what primarily interests me here. First of all, then, he is passionately interested in the childhood and youth he spent in Glasgow and Aberdeen. When he deals with these themes, it is from a romantic standpoint, and he makes almost an inverted virtue of the gaucheness of his adolescent years, and of the suffering it caused him. Yet, in his retrospective view, he is remarkably free from the fuggy, the superior, or the maudlin note which afflicts so many when they consider their formative years. He is humorously aware of early limitations—that he was considered 'odd' at parties, trod on his partner's feet at dances, and groped in vain for the warming, flattering trivialities of drawing-room conversation—yet what really interests him in retrospect is the painful stages of self-discovery.

So few are lucky in the natural mode
And I was always an unlucky one . . .

Yet this is not said in a mood of languishing self-pity. Already in the poems written before the war, he is struggling to reach an objective attitude to himself and the world. The opening lines of an early sonnet, published in his first book, *The Fatal Landscape*, contain a significant hint of his later development:

> *My simple heart, bred in provincial tenderness,*
> *And my cold mind, that takes the world for theme . . .*

The significant word, in this rather muted and elegiac context, is 'provincial'. Already, in his preface to *The New Apocalypse*, of which he and G. F. Hendry were the chief theoreticians, Fraser had presented the case for the movement as a 'romantic' revolt against the Auden-Spender-MacNeice domination of the 'thirties, with their political attitudes and their appeal to an abstract, universal listener. As against this, Fraser suggested a fresh exploration of individual sensibility: '. . . the Apocalyptics are more interested in grasping the complication and the confusion of their private experiences . . . A romantic poet, in the sense in which the Apocalyptics are romantic, is interested in objectivity in a deeper sense, the *accurate* denotation of the contents of his subjective universe . . .' Thus, as Fraser uses the word, 'provincialism' has a very special quality, and might stand almost for a doctrine. The 'province' he is thinking of will not be found on any ordinance survey map: rather, it is a province of the mind, ruled by kindness, or, as a metaphysical figure, the necessity of a return from the 'historic poster-world' with its murderous generalizations to the world of a personal morality.

It is interesting to note, at this point, that his notion of 'provincialism' is at the opposite pole from a narrowly regional patriotism. He dislikes chauvinism wherever he sees it, and has been at pains to make clear his attitude to his own country, as any dozen or more quotations chosen at random will show.

> *Romantic Scotland was an emigrant,*
> *Half-blooded, and escaped from sullen weather . . .*

He can speak with affection, it is true, of 'our glittering and resourceful north', but there is no false illusion involved: for he is speaking equally of the north of

> *Glasgow, that damned sprawling evil town*

And his attitude is given perhaps its most succinct expression in

the poem *To Hugh Macdiarmid,* when he says:

> *What a race has is always crude and common,*
> *And not the human or the personal;*
> *I would take sword up only for the human,*
> *Not to revive the broken ghosts of Gael.*

The New Apocalypse has had sufficient obsequies, execratory or regretful. Yet, before leaving the first phase of Fraser's work, bounded roughly by his joining the army and going overseas, it is useful for several reasons to revalue the manifesto he prepared for it, as a ready key to his tastes, his gift for subtle analysis, and the influence of his contemporaries upon him. Thus, in this last context, we find that, in his appraisal of three 'apocalyptic' poets, what he admired in Hendry was the hard, explosive quality of impersonal images drawn from a monochrome, news-reel world, taut with waiting violence: yet was equally appreciative of the sustained, Spenserian music of Henry Treece's early work; and in Nicholas Moore, praised the easy fluency of utterance, the grace seeming 'only half conscious, like that of a physically beautiful person'. Towards the end of his essay, he says, with some of the youthful and optimistic intransigeance that marks the whole movement, that the apocalyptics are 'much more definitely interested in being poets than in being persons'. I think he would modify that statement to-day. And if his attitude has changed, the key to that change is to be found in the experience of war, and a long spell of service in the Middle East.

Perhaps too much was made of the Middle East phase at the time by those who experienced it: perhaps it was not so sharply defined as we may have thought. Was there ever a Cairo 'school'? Was it seeking to asseverate something 'new', or was it struggling to preserve a vital continuity? The truth is that there were several exiled groups, and all the thrills of a bloodless fray: and if what once, in a glamorous moment, sounded like the roaring of lions was more like the yapping of pomeranians, it was enjoyable all the same, and no one enjoyed it more than Fraser. But this was a more frivolous aspect of war (consistently underrated by writers on war themes, but still frivolous). Beneath it, more profound changes took place. Whatever bold and imaginative theories one might have started out with, war experienced in the flesh shook the kaleidoscope of individual sensibility into patterns not foreseen.

In a *Letter to Henry Treece* written from the Middle East, Fraser himself tries to sum up the transformation. 'Let us say the special scene, the special person lose their irrational magic . . .' *The New Apocalypse,* as has been remarked, ended on a note of youthful optimism: its purpose was 'to mount guard over the integrity of the imagination and the completeness of man'. But the search for completeness was necessarily disrupted by the individual's lonely sequestration in a great, blindly lumbering machine. And the apocalyptics had forgotten the slow cancerous growth of habit. Yet Cairo proved to be the place where 'habit was excess'. 'The countless erotic half-loaves that add up to no lovely bread'. 'It is this which makes me sad and heavy, which gives me a nostalgia for virtue, for the small towns . . .' (Here is another echo of the imagined 'province'). And then, looking back on the *Apocalypse* period, he says: 'We introduced a critical attitude to that dialectic of images that is a poem. What we did not lay enough emphasis on, I feel now, was the critical attitude of the poet, not only towards his poetry, but towards himself'. This introduces a new note of personal responsibility which I shall turn to in a moment.

Meanwhile, the phrase 'a nostalgia for virtue' finds an echo in a poem called *The Death of My Grandmother*:

> *O travellers,*
> *Who take the stain of Time as I have done,*
> *Expose your fluctuations to the sun:*
> *Yet, for such stony virtue spare your tears.*

This poem is one of a cycle dealing with the theme of exile, which occupies a large part of Fraser's second and third volumes of verse, *Home Town Elegy* and *The Traveller Has Regrets.* And the theme demands separate consideration, in any study of Fraser's poetry, not only for the varied expression he gives it, but for its deeper implications. An unabashed lament in an early poem foreshadows the concrete experience:

> *And the sick novice whimpers for his home*
> *Who shall be hurt and horribly alone . . .*

The concrete experience tempered and refined the mood. *Egypt,* which almost more vividly than any other war poem I know expresses the nostalgia of a soldier on overseas service, begins:

Who knows the lights at last, who knows the cities
And the unloving hands upon the thighs
Would yet return to seek his home-town pretties
For the shy finger-tips and sidelong eyes.

It is still the dream province for which the poet yearns. Yet distance gives his nostalgia a sharper focus, the tragic waste and loss of war seen with his own eyes lend a greater, more bitter, urgency to his tone.

In this historic poster-world I move,
Noise, movement, emptiness, but never love . . .

There is a new hardness and detachment in these lines: and from such a vantage point, Fraser is able to take a fastidious delight in the small, accidental ironies of war, with a certain wry, sardonic humour levelled both at himself and at the vivid, rootless, stagey life of foreign towns. As in *Letter from Asmara, May 1943,* when he writes:

I write to you from the high air, from the shabby
Colonial town that laid Ethiopia dead,
Mountains romantic in Prokosch's geography
But not to a Sergeant with a Sunday morning head . . .

Fascism sits unshaved
Drinking its morning bibita in the café,
Discussing the latest radiodiscorsa of Ansaldo
Or Colonel Stevens—but happy either way

That war at last is a matter of talk and maps,
With no horrible messages hurtling out of the sky: . . .

Still, it is not all waste and loss. Beneath the humorous shrug and the quiet despair, exile has its positive and beneficial aspect —a sort of forced maturing process, which leads to a sharpened awareness of the general human predicament. For it is the ache of personal estrangement that makes the poet sense most keenly the fragility of all human contacts; and gives him pity and understanding in the deeper sense, a disillusioned gentleness.

This leads me to the last point I wish to dwell on: and there has been no space to speak of Fraser's lighter verse, his 'occasional' pieces, nor the translations which he has made from poets as different as Horace, Cavalcanti and André Breton, D'Annun-

zio, Mallarmé and Pablo Neruda. As I remarked earlier, what primarily interest me here are his intellectual preoccupations. There is a passage from his *Letter to Henry Treece* which is significant:

> *'Cruelty still appals me more than anything else . . . I don't believe that the most brilliant achievements of a civilization that in the last reckoning rests upon torture can outweigh, or even alleviate, the horrors. The degradation remains degradation. The pain remains pain.'*

It is an ungrateful task, to seek a convenient label under which a poet's work may be neatly classified and filed away. And the word 'humanist' is perhaps one of the most ambiguous and most maltreated in any language. Yet that is the word that seems to me most adequately to sum up a certain quality that persists through all Fraser's poetry. And if I choose to call his poetry 'humanist', it is as good a way as any of summarizing his particular attitude to history, his abiding interest in human systems of thought, and his sense of quest. From his attitude to history arises his interest in a contemporary philosophy like existentialism: for although he is able to view history in one sense as a pageant, in its immanent aspect of successive events, he also sees it as an infinity of moral choices—which is perhaps the only way of perceiving the essence of true tragedy. He has written few poems that could be called religious, yet there is a hint of religious search in more than one treatment of a philosophical theme. In *How the Heart grows Cold,* for example:

> *Jerusalem or Babylon*
> *on both roads my dream had gone:*
> *but the waking city is neither one*

or in *The Black Cherub*:

> *I shall balance revolution against heaven*
> *And die a bourgeois still, and still unshriven*

In discussions of philosophy, he is frequently fond of quoting Bishop Butler's doctrine of 'reasonable self-love'. Yet beyond the frontiers of reason, he is aware of the more primitive chaos, forever threatening yet forever necessary.

> *Without this concept of the shapeless, no shape:*
> *Without your gulf at the edge, no edge to living!*

He is aware, too, that mind rises above that chaos only by its own continual effort, and bears ever at its centre a barely-tamed chaos forever ready to burst out. As he says in an early poem:

And mine, alas, the dry, dissecting mind
Inhabited by monsters . . .

Most people manage to live fairly tranquilly with their monsters, because the monsters are masked. The poet cannot afford such a luxury. It is his knowledge of the frailty of all human systems that gives the underlying note of compassion to much of Fraser's best poetry. He would profoundly endorse that memorable statement of Vauvenargues:

> *'En considérant l'extrême faiblesse des hommes, les incompatibilités de leur fortune avec leur humeur, leurs malheurs toujours plus grands que leurs vices, et leurs vertus toujours moindres que leurs devoirs, je conclus qu'il n'y a de juste que la loi de l'humanité, et que le tempérament de l'indulgence.'*

But he himself has given a poignant enough expression to man's earthly destiny.

And in some sphere above
Choice, with what irony,
What bright Potentials *move!*

ERIK DE MAUNY.

THE SIGNIFICANT IN POETRY by B. EVAN OWEN.

THE American critic, Donald A. Stauffer, has compared a poem to a person, having the qualities of exactness, intensity, significance, complexity, concreteness, rhythm and form. Christopher Caudwell in 'Illusion and Reality' does not allow 'significance' a place in his list of characteristics of poetry, presumably because he takes it for granted. Nevertheless, it is a surprising omission for a Marxist critic to make. On the other hand, Stauffer bases his whole argument upon the inevitability of significance. Whatever the poet takes as his subject

has significance. It is seen through the poet's eyes, his sense of smell, his sense of touch, and his reaction is conditioned by his present circumstances and the state of his digestion. From this viewpoint, the idea of art as an end in itself, unrelated to reality, is impossible and it must follow that the significance of poetry is not only a moral significance but that all poetry is a means to an end that is essentially didactic. Thus far, Caudwell would agree; the dissension arises at the point where a definition of reality becomes necessary.

For Caudwell reality is material in essence and man must appreciate the importance of its economic manifestations. If that is the nature of reality and we accept the need for poetry to be in accordance with reality, Mayakovsky was right in his determination to tread 'on the throat of my very own songs', and Paul Potts is a more important poet than Eliot.

If, however, reality is conceived as being much more, in essence, than economic and material; if the greater part of reality is in the realm of things spiritual; if it is true, as Professor D. G. James asserts, echoing Coleridge, that the imagination is omnipresent in all conscious response to the world; then the significance of poetry can be found in Wordsworth and Auden, Eliot and Potts, Mayakovsky and Pasternak, Aragon and Eluard.

'Poetry', writes Richard Church, 'is God travelling incognito.' The real significance of poetry is in its contact with something beyond our rationally conceived world of classes and the struggle for existence, and which is the common denominator of all poetry. It is this quality which compelled the Marxist, Potts to write in defence of the crypto-Fascist, Ezra Pound; that caused Pound to write of Whitman,

> *We have one sap and one root,*
> *Let there be commerce between us.*

This common denominator not only operates between poets but is common to all men. The poet's vision is an individual experience (if it is poetry it can be no other), but that does not absolve him from the duty he has towards his non-poetical contemporaries. Words are an inadequate vehicle for the stuff of poetry and the limited vocabulary of the layman imposes a further obstacle in the way of valid transference of experience. However much he tries to make his work comprehensible to the laity, there will be occasions when he must either fail or abandon poetry for prose, but the determination must always be present.

I would have my own vision
The world's vision:
The beauty settled in my mind
A lamp in a busy street.
(Herbert Read)

It is not easy to assess the value of Mayakovsky's poetry from reading translations of his work, for he is the most untranslatable of modern poets, but Russian students affirm the beauty of his poems in his native language. Mayakovsky was a part of the Revolution in its early stages, before the rot set in. When he suppressed his singing he was not acting under the external compulsion of the Party but obeying an inner compulsion. It may have been bad for his poetry but it was not with his tongue in his cheek that he wrote

All my echoing might as a poet
Is for you,
Workers,
Class in attack.

His poetry became a part of Soviet life and his poems were read aloud at huge assemblies of his compatriots. He was an epic figure, noble and tragic in his child-like simplicity and unable to match the suave posturings of some of his masters.

Alex Comfort is an anarchist in the tradition of Kropotkin and Herbert Read and therefore his veiw of life, his philosophy, is opposed to that of Mayakovsky. Yet there is in his poems and essays the same fundamental significance, that sense of one-ness with all humanity, forming his lines and constructing his themes. In common with many of his contemporaries, with Sidney Keyes in particular, Comfort sees in modern society a headlong progression towards death allied to an unconscious desire to hasten the process. Equating the State with death and with the forces of evil, he advocates a militant anarchism, a deliberate Ghandian attack upon the entrenched power of authority. He would emphasize Graham Greene's recent declaration that the writer 'must be a piece of grit in the State machinery', and the title of his recently published book of poems, *'Signal to Engage*, indicates his belief that the time is now. The choice before us cannot be avoided,

If you are willing to die, then choose obedience . . . .

In his much publicized essay, *Art and Social Responsibility*, Comfort deals at length with the place of the artist in modern society.

> ". . . *now politically we regard ourselves as absolved. The State has consistently shown itself to be evil, in so far as we are able to understand evil. It has absolved us by rejecting individuality, to which as artists we are obliged to cling, even though in retaining it we are forced to face the reality of personal death, the bitterest thought that any interpretive mind can face . . . We now accept no responsiblity to any group, only to individuals . . . We recognize boundless responsibility to men, especially to all those who are deprived of their voices, but ultimately to all men, since they will in time become silent.*

This may sound like the platitudes of a dis-illusioned Marxist, but it represents a large body of intellectual opinion, especially among the younger poets, in our day, and of our experiences. It may be an abdication from society as at present constituted, but it is in no way an abdication from humanity. Love for the latter is, in fact, the dynamic behind the campaign.

In the Spanish Civil War, anarchists, communists and socialists joined hands in resisting Franco. It is, perhaps, fitting that the most important Spanish poet of the century was, in essentials, a-political. In his poetry, Federico Garcia Lorca expressed the universal desires of the masses in a way seldom surpassed. It was because he was a poet and precisely because he was not a politician, that the Falangists decided he was dangerous enough to murder. A poet is more of a threat to Fascism than a Bolshevik.

Lorca was immersed in the folk-lore, living and vibrant, of the Spanish peasantry. He was blood of their blood, his thoughts and reactions were rooted in the history of his peoples and he remained to the end of his life uncontaminated by the sophistication of Madrid, Paris and London. He believed religiously in the ideal of personal freedom, yet, like Mayakovsky, he identified himself completely with the masses, in brotherhood.

During the Civil War, a young, illiterate, Republican soldier asked Arturo Barea to read him some of Lorca's poetry. Barea read a poem about the olive fields of Jaen, from which the young soldier had come to fight against Fascism.

The olive fiela
Opens and shuts
Like a fan.
Over the olive groves
Is a deep sky
And dusky rain
Of cold stars.
Shadows and rushes shiver
On the river bank,
The grey air ripples,
The olive trees
Are laden with cries . . .

That's right,' cried the soldier. Look. If you stand in the middle of an olive field between the trees, you look along a straight lane like a fan that's shut: If you go behind a tree, all the rows between the lanes open up like a fan . . . and so on.

Working in the olive fields from morning to night, the boy had often been near starvation, but they were his trees and Lorca's verses stirred his love for the trees which had been the whole of his life. Although Lorca was always, first a poet and second a social commentator; although in the poem quoted there is no reference to the social tragedy of the groves or of their effect on the young workers; although he seldom refers directly to the struggle for life in the Spain of the Civil Guard, he was regarded by the people as their poet, and therefore a revolutionary.

In England we have not suffered the same degree of social upheaval as the peoples of Spain. Nevertheless, there are indications in the popularity of broadcast poetry readings, often badly mis-managed, of a similar acceptance of the validity of poetical expression for the people in their day-to-day existence.

It does not follow that because the subject matter of contemporary poetry appears to be unrelated to the social pattern, such work is lacking in significance, that it has nothing for the people. If the poets are of the people, with the inspiration of shared experiences, then, despite their reaction against blatantly 'proletarian' poetry, they may still be laying the foundations of a new folk poetry. By the universality of their imagery, the sympathy of their understanding and clarity of their language, the poets may once again become the voice of the people. Of all the people; for the people are more than the proletariat. Some poets will sing songs that appeal more to one social group than to an-

other. It is thus with music. But they will be but variations on the same theme, striking the same chord of fraternity in the hearts of the crowd.

Kenneth Patchen, in whose work can be found a breadth of vision and of human one-ness conspicuously lacking in his compatriots, apart from such rare spirits as Henry Miller, the prose-writer and Ben Shahn, the painter, shall provide the last word.

The hour of love and dignity and peace
Is surely not dead.
With more splendour than these sombre lives,
The gates within us
Open on the brilliant gardens of the sun.
Then do these inscrutable soldiers rise upward,
Nourished and flowering
On the battleslopes of the Unseen. For Victory,
Unlike the sponsored madness in these undertakings,
Is not diminished by what is mortal; but on his peaks
Grows until the dark caverns are alight
With the ordained radiance of all mankind.

WORDSWORTH by HERBERT READ. (Faber 15s.).

SINCE the first appearance of this book in 1930, Herbert Read's interpretation of Wordsworth has passed increasingly into currency, and it is difficult for a reader who was not present in spirit at the first publication to measure the novelty of what Read had to say. This is probably his most important critical work, and fully deserves its reputation, but its most interesting aspect is not, I think, its contribution to scholarship so much as Read's success in fusing the psychological and the interpretative approaches to criticism, and making the product command attention. In Wordsworth he is dealing with a writer who cannot be understood apart from his personality, but unlike the majority of psychological critics Read has the requisite sympathy and comprehension for literature, and the personal conviction of the significance of art, which effectually limit his psychological study within the field of criticism—which make him avoid, in other words, the heresy of making the poetry a symptom, while refuting the opposite heresy which treats Wordsworth and

his personality as an irrelevant, idealized appendage to *The Prelude*.

Read exemplifies none of the defects of psychological criticism, largely because he is familiar with psychology as a separate study. And he manages to avoid pressing theoretical considerations too far. It would clearly be possible to speculate, probably correctly, about the part played in determining Wordsworth's relations to Annette, to Dorothy Wordsworth, and to the idea of Nature, by the rather shadowy figure of his mother: study of this kind is more profitable to psychiatry than to literature, and Read keeps his attention, and that of his reader, focussed on the one point which is essential to the understanding of the poetry—the effect of the *affaire* Annette on Wordsworth himself, and on his powers of composition and thought.

It is, I think, not universally true that conflicts tend to diminish artistic output, but where the artist is a reasonably stable personality they limit its scope, and conflicts which involve any severe loss of insight, or any severe impairment of the writer's confidence in his own sincerity, almost always impair his performance. Read himself is an opposite case, a writer whose volume of work has been limited by his sincerity, and by his search for completeness, which have led him to work in such a variety of fields that he voluntarily limits his recognition in any one of them. But the fact that Wordsworth shared, up to a point, this search for an integral literary expression makes Read a particularly sensitive critic of his work. The appeal of Wordsworth as a writer depends so largely on congruence between his personality and that of the reader that he is particularly difficult to criticize sensibly—readers are too sharply divided over his major works. I think this explains his lack of appeal compared with Shelley and Keats, at least in my own case, and probably in other people's. But it is still possible to approach intellectually a writer who, because of some such difference of outlook, fails to inspire direct sensuous pleasure, and if a reprint of Read's book stimulates the attempt to read Wordsworth intelligently (he is generally, I think, read unintelligently, or at least without comprehension of the background) it will have been doubly worthwhile.

ALEX COMFORT

Form in Modern Poetry by HERBERT READ (Vision Press, 6s.)

THIS book was first published in 1932, but for this edition, Mr. Read has added a new preface. What a distinguished poet has to say about his art must always be more worth reading than the confused phrases of the minor literati. In it he expresses some regret that the new generation of poets should have turned away from freedoms gained by the technical advances after the revolution of Pound and Eliot. Rather wistfully he looks back to the heights on which stood the giants for whom the liberation of form was the liberation of the spirit, and laments the return to the metrical virtuosities of the traditional academic forms behind which the young now seem to wish to hide their uncertain souls. Mr. Read, whose own work is the best example of a limpid clarity, deplores the tangled skein out of which comes no true growth of mind. But there is room for unending argument here. A good part of the book is taken up with the exposition of the psychological approach to criticism not nearly so fashionable to-day as it used to be. It is when Mr. Read discusses the whole theory of poetry in its broader sense though, rather than in its passing forms that he is most interesting. And how that phrase 'the sense of words is the sense of poetry' echoes the advice any editor of a poetry magazine must be continually giving to the hopeful poet. At the end of this short book is an acute discussion of the long poem. The long poem is a sore temptation to us all which we might well do our best to avoid, like Ulysses resolutely determining not to be ensirened. It seems probable that the dramatic form is going to appeal much more in the future. But at the modest price of six shillings this book should be bought by any poet who takes his work seriously. It is one that should be in the most exiguous library of those waiting patiently for the crack up of our times.

WREY GARDINER.

Réveil à Minuit: Poèmes 1935-1945, par Paul Palgen (La Maison du Poète, Bruxelles—Paris)

IN this decade of poems, Monsieur Palgen shows no great change in style and subject, but the whole range has a quiet but penetrating insistence which sometimes reminds me of poems by Max Jacob and at other times of the earlier Eluard. Again, there are echoes of Verlaine. Perhaps the best

thing I can do in such a short space is to give two quotations. The first is from 'Filles sous la pluie':

Celles qui vont qui viennent
Captives d'un trottoir
Celles du pas des portes
Chuchotant dans le noir . . .

and the second is from 'Occupation' and likens the Germans and the people whom they have conquered to two different kinds of blood in the same arteries:

Dissemblables, deux sangs circulent dans ses artères,
Celui-là, d'huile lourde et celui-ci d'eau légère,
Se touchant se frôlant, à jamais impenetrables
Dans l'obscur inconscient de combats invisibles.

ROLAND GANT

POSTPONED HARVEST

Modern Poetry and the Tradition by CLEANTH BROOKS (Editions Poetry London, 12s. 6d.); *Christ and Nietzsche* by G. WILSON KNIGHT (Staples Press, 15s.); *Poems* by DAVID WRIGHT (Editions Poetry London, 5s.).

ONE aspect shared by all three books, here under review, is that of a time-lag: our sense of their having been written or begun some unconscionable years before publication. At first, this may seem an irrelevancy; a factor in no wise to be counted in appreciating their intrinsic value. This, however, is a 'purist' illusion.

The first, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* was published some ten years ago in America (though the English publishers make no reference to it) and if—as its author so truly writes—'every poet that we read alters to some degree our total conception of poetry', then we have the new directions of the last ten years unaccounted for in the critic's sum view-point. In the second book, *Christ and Nietzsche,* Mr. Wilson Knight admits in his preface that the work was started in 1938 and modified, in progress, through the years of war, till its completion in 1948. As his attempt has been to seek a viable politic and way-of-living

from a study of certain great English poets and German philisophers of the last century, the impingement of political affairs on such an endeavour will not be negligible. None the less, the author has been honest about it; whereas we might have appreciated a greater candour in the publishers of the first.

The time-lag element in the third—a first book of poems by David Wright—exemplifies so prevailing a condition in the publication of verse that no specific censure can be levelled at anyone. Appearing in December last, these poems were probably accepted for publication some two or three or more years ago, and some of them written a while before that. In the case of an older accredited writer, who has long since won his spurs, the knowledge of such facts for the reader is, of course, a less necessary pointer in the task of his rating and appreciation; but when the poet who is young and malleable, and in the stage of maturation, publishes his virgin volume without a clue to the dates of composition, the conception which the reader arrives at may be far from immaculate. As this is one of those few embarrassments which poets can remedy for themselves, I suggest—for what it is worth—the following procedure: namely, that each separate poem included in a work submitted as a first publication should be printed with the date of its composition. Unless the poet feels he is rolling down-hill, this method would appear to present him more fairly.

In spite of omitting the last ten years in the formulation of his view-point, this present work of Mr. Cleanth Brooks is an excellent, sober, and conscientious study. Making no pretence to originality, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* may well be described as a syncoptic gospel of all-but contemporary criticism: a skilful combination and application of the texts and tenents of our latter-day apostles—Messrs. Eliot, Empson, Ransom, Tate and Richards. Briefly, its thesis may be stated as a plea for and proof (?) that the best English verse is an art 'of inclusion' and not 'of exclusion'; a highly synthetic form of expression in which most varied and discordant elements are brought together and imaginatively resolved. This psychological realism, he traces from its presence in the 'metaphysical poets' and the Elizabethan playwrights (through its desuetude in Augustan verse, and most of the verse of the nineteenth century) to its resurrection in Hardy, and its employment in our own age by Eliot, Ransom, Tate, and Frost, Macleish, Auden, Yeats, and Penn Warren. A sense of irony—preserving proportion—is, thus, according to Mr. Cleanth Brooks, perhaps the most indispensable factor in the writing of

adult and durable verse. His theory, of course, is popular and tenable; but one may speculate just how far such an attitude is really a defence-reflex; and just in what degree a fear of being fooled, of 'letting oneself go' occasions it. There are, after all, certain moments of existence—moods of exaltation, of acceptance, or of praise—in which irony would seem to be out of place. It is, however, as we know, somewhat rare to experience such moments to-day.

But whether or not one agrees with the principles of Mr. Cleanth Brooks, his essays on specific modern poets (on Ransom, Penn Warren, and Tate, etc.) provide us with a close-range textual study, a 'tooth-comb' verbal analysis, singularly lacking in recent English criticism (*pace* Mr. Leavis on this score, at least!)

Whereas Mr. Cleanth Brooks stresses the necessity for a combination of discordant phenomena in the poet's consciousness, Mr. Wilson Knight, in his book *Christ and Nietzsche*, makes the plea for a combination of conscious and subconscious elements in the imagination of our leaders and our poets (a synthesis, it would appear, of German romanticism and English 'common-sense') though the following quotation fills the present reviewer with doubts as to whether he has understood his author, or how far his author has understood himself: 'English literature is characterized by compactness and fibrous strength. The close-twisted fabric of the Shakespearian drama, with its king-protagonist and bearing at its heart symbolic shadowings of eternal purpose, holds exact reference to the queen-centred and divinely-conceived structure of the Tudor state'.

Unlike certain critics of literature, the writer of this notice has no desire (presumably resulting from inverted pedantry—an attempt to use Attic or American speech for matters demanding exacter language) to describe philosophical diction as 'jargon'; but Mr. Wilson Knight's obscure eloquence with regard to 'symbolical shadowings of eternal purpose', etc., seems to him just so much higher mumbo-jumbo. Such language is neither 'flesh, fowl, or good red herring'. It is neither of the market-place nor of the schools.

The poetic eloquence of Mr. David Wright is of quite a different order to this: lyrical, earth-born, and realistic; though with the Romantic's discontent for all that is too inescapably present and an impassioned counter-balancing enquiry for something whose lack is not absence but a need. So, in the poem *Atlantic Eclogue*, the poet's 'submarine brother, a drowned sailor, speaks:

'I say that what I wanted was not much.
It was not money or a private yacht,
not in these things, I knew, was my peace put.
I knew then what I wanted; it was not
much, but too much for any man to get.

Applying Mr. Cleanth Brook's method, we might assess the degree of reality which this verse could be said to contain by measuring the range of its verbal inclusions, its synthesis of elevated diction and slang: 'Look, there are many on the road to Rome/ . . . . . / the foreign hearts, frustrated it may be/ cheesed-off and empty-handed, far from home'; 'He takes her in, the unemphatic hater / of the continual boredom of the sky / . . . . . / my similar, my brother, and my china'; but this approach, although interesting, would leave unexamined the poet's chief talent, which seems to be his gift of musicalization. One of the few good Romantic poets, writing since the death of Sidney Keyes, his verse lacks the drive and magnificence—the sonorousness of John Heath-Stubbs at his best, just as it lacks the elegance—the slighter neatness—of John Bayliss. But both of these poets he leaves behind in his power of lyrical modulation, his ability to regulate the levels of his song.

This first volume is good, and its promise even better.

DEREK STANFORD.

Gates of Beauty and Death by C. BUSBY SMITH (The Fortune Press, 6s.); *The Singing Blood* by GEOFFREY WAGNER (The Decker Press, $2); *Stone in the Midst* by PATRIC DICKINSON (Methuen, 7s. 6d.); *Collected Poems of John Gawsworth.* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 10s. 6d.)

THE work of Mr. Busby Smith is characterized by a vibrant sensitivity to experience which yet somehow seldom succeeds in integrating itself into satisfactory poems. There is so little to take hold on; it is shy, elusive and tenuous. Not that one doubts his sincerity or the genuine suffering out of which a poem like *We Two*—perhaps the best thing here—is born:

Yet now these things are lost,
hand torn from hand asunder,
all things that we have known
cherished or hated most,
all things held most in wonder.

But the simplicity and directness of this poem is not often repeated in these pages, and a certain number of poets—Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, Eliot—have been imperfectly assimilated. His most ambitious work is, perhaps, *Poem for Autumn*, and at first sight it is as impressive as this stanza:

Autumn, silent after the murmuring voices of summer—
voices in the cornfields, voices in the orchard,
words springing out of the ridges of the hills
and the song of the newly dead from the shroud of
river and sea—
turns slowly round and nestles under the wind.
What through the spring we dreamed we knew, and
planned;
what in the grave of winter we hammered to a leaf
of lead,
a sheaf of knowledge, fashioned for our bitter cross
crumbles and dies, leaving us only
with a waste of words, a stagnant pool of meanings.
And in the grey evening we are lost again, and find
no solace in the sudden sunset.

But it abounds in overtones of *Murder in the Cathedral* and the *Four Quartets*.

Mr. Smith needs, too, to watch his epithets on which the life of his nouns depend: they illuminate or they smother, and too often here, in their deadness, they smother: 'grey leaves', 'solemn midnight', 'dark waves', 'deep graves', all from one short poem on p.8, and 'black night', 'bright sun', 'cold prison' from a single stanza on p.35, are sufficient examples. And 'Heart, like a dove', and 'wounded dove of the heart' is too often—twice too often—in a single volume. But Mr. Smith is young—he was born in 1924—and this first collection shows considerable promise particularly, perhaps, among the religious pieces in the second half of the book. He has not, it would seem, sufficiently achieved that emotional tension that Herbert Read desiderates for poetic composition, but he has an alert and sensitive mind and his future development

will be worth watching. Perhaps next time, too, he will be a little more judicious in his choice of title.

From Illinois comes *The Singing Blood* of Mr. Geoffrey Wagner. Now Mr. Wagner is not devoid of a certain verbal facility, but for the most part his poems describe a mood instead of realising an experience; *Visitor* is, perhaps, an exception. They lack organization or compelling form; the poetic patterns just 'happen' instead of being integral to the particular experience. And his realistic amatory efforts *épater le bourgeois* are curiously infelicitous. One feels the beloved as well as the bourgeois will be slightly shocked to learn her lips are 'plushy', her back 'sleek and sweating', or that the height of her lover's desire is to

Feel all a man's mad moods
Latent in your insides.

It is with something of relief that one turns to Mr. Patric Dickinson.

For with Mr. Dickinson, both in his broadcast drama, *The Stone in the Midst,* and the poems included in the volume, we are in that realm of modern poetry where the intellect plays an important contributory part both in composition and in apprehension by the reader. Occasionally the intellect has clogged the writer's imaginative fire and we get a verse argument—admittedly a significant one—instead of a poem, as in parts of *A Sunset Rumination.* On the other hand, we have, not 'pure' lyrics, but poems in which the thought has been almost wholly transmuted into song, like the beautiful *A Lyme Regis Thrush,* or the poem ending:

To say 'beautiful' is to hear
Or to court the echo 'fool'—
But there I see you stand
So brilliant in the snow
That my brown eye must rest
On the brown bird in your hand
Or blinded upon your breast
Never look on your brow
My love my dear darling.

Yeats? Yes, as well as in the difficult but perhaps most important poem here, *The Symbol and the Real,* or in lines like these (recalling *Coole and Ballylee*) from the play:

Five generations are here.
Chairs, tables, spoons and forks in continual use,
Beautiful things whose beauty teaches,
Shapes, almost, our human dignities;

But, seen in their contexts, Yeats transmuted to the author's own image.

The play, effective without being outstanding on the radio, reads rather less well. Mr. Dickinson's arguments against the Philistines who have occupied the country, shooting the young poet, Dick Winter, for two hundred acts of sabotage (poems) against the new uniformity, become at times a little shrill. More importantly, there is lacking just that fusion between the Symbol and the Real which makes the poem of that title so significant. Yet the play has memorable lines—like these on the artist's frustration:

You plant words and no meaning comes up—
Nothing you can eat or use: no taste or sap;

the reminder that two wars have killed off the best leaving,

Two generations of the second rate
Surviving running,

—easier prey for the new tyrants. Looking over Europe to-day we see it; some, including Mr. Dickinson, see it nearer home.

The poems remain, however, the most important part of the book. Mr. Dickinson's work reflects the complexity of the modern world of which he is so conscious—and in the 'atom' poems, *The Tree* and *Trumpet of Hiroshima,* a little self-conscious: these two and *The Sun,* dedicated to Edith Sitwell, reveal the impact of that poet's later work. He is much concerned, too, with the power of using words that at one moment

Sweat and starve
Like men for a true living,

and at another

seem to shed
Cocoons of meaning they have grown.

That increasing familiarity with these poems does reveal unsuspected 'cocoons of meaning' is the measure of their interest and our pleasure in them.

In the sea of modern poetry Mr. Gawsworth long ago purchased one tiny island, built his house thereon, and furnished it in period fashion: *décor* by Beardsley, lounge and boudoir by Dowson and Arthur Symons, curtains and pianola by A. E. Housman. But the poet who dwells there has, in some inexplicable way, escaped from this periodicity and has indeed imposed his own personality on his furniture and environment, secured the rights in perpetuity of his island, and can justly claim to-day

'Tis Love's own fortress—and 'tis mine!

His *Collected Poems* span the last twenty years and are all he wishes to preserve from well over twenty volumes, including sixty-five poems never previously published in this country. There is about most of them, at least till 1944, a certain 'artless artificiality'; many of them are less love poems than poems of a love convention, a game in which both sides are perfectly aware of the 'rules'; a game of which he is the sole important living exponent. This is not in the least to impugn the sincerity of the sentiments; the artifice is entirely confined to the diction and imagery. Such poetry will always find its small circle of devotees, if only for its subtle differentiation from its '90's predecessors;

Sleep in love and bind arms tightly
Round the residues of life;
Take your living moments lightly,
Swiftly falls that severing knife,

is just *not* Housman; yet it is difficult to say why. The virtues of this poetry are simplicity, ingenuousness and a certain singing quality; its defects an emotional slackness and consequent thinness of texture; its dangers, vapidity and occasional bathos.

During the war years, however, he wrote an increasing amount of objective poetry. This is not the same, or perhaps so high a thing, as saying his poetry became increasingly objective, for the old note, with its virtues and defects, is constantly heard beside it; but this objectivism is a new and valuable thing. It is to be found among the poems he wrote in Africa, Italy and India: *Croce at Sorrento, Where Keats Died, The Dead Pilot,* or *Pantini in Vasto*; and among them, too, in a poem like *Difficulties,* comes a sense of metaphysical complexity of which his earlier poetry was almost entirely innocent. But perhaps his happiest invention of these war years was the sequence on Cleopatra—taken from *Nine Poems* (1944). Here was the opportunity, fittingly and with-

out extravagance, for that rich sensuousness and smouldering passion than can so easily strike a false note in the subjective lyric. In these six poems he is almost entirely successful in what he is trying to do.

When in India he wrote a poem at Rose Aylmer's grave—and the mind turns to that exquisite lyrist Landor who, too, wrote for the selected few. Mr. Gawsworth lacks, habitually, the classical restraint and austerity of a Landor or a Housman and the latter's inexorable relentlessness. Yet Landor might not have disdained to write:

When women speak unto their lovers
Often they do not choose their words,
But loose, unwitting, on bright pinions,
Phantasmal birds;

nor Housman disown, as a posthumous poem, the one here that opens,

Satanic horns are blowing
The view halloo of doom
And summoned Man is going
To dig his little room.

It is interesting to speculate what Mr. Gawsworth will do if his innate lyric gifts and his verbal facility can become more consistently disciplined to his new objective delineation of experience. The results may be worth watching.

HERMANN PESCHMANN.

Novalis: Hymns to the Night, translated by MABEL COTTERELL (Phoenix Press, 7s. 6d.); *Rilke: Life of the Virgin Mary,* translated by C. F. MACINTYRE (University of California Press, C.U.P., 14s.); *Rilke: Duino Elegies,* translated by J. B. LEISHMAN and STEPHEN SPENDER (Revised edition, Hogarth Press, 8s. 6d.); *Selected Poems* by JOHN BETJEMAN (John Murray, 8s. 6d.); *Commemorations* by JOHN PUDNEY (Bodley Head, 3s. 6d.).

IN an introductory essay of astonishing erudition and understanding, which enhances considerably the value of Miss Mabel Cotterell's translation of *Hymnen an die Nacht,* Professor Closs indicates to the general English reader the immense influence, comparable almost to that of Goethe and Hoelderlin, which Novalis, through his life and friendships as

well as his work, has exerted over German literature. He draws attention to similarities in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with the sanctification of night, or death, as the fulfilment of love and living which is the inspiration of the body of Novalis' writing, and, in particular, of the *Hymns*. It is perhaps also of interest to note that Rilke's conception of death (*der grosse Tod*) seems like a development of that of Novalis, though admittedly some distance lies between Rilke's *O Herr, gib jedem seinen eignen Tod* with its insistence on the individuality of death, and the attitude of Novalis which, as expressed in one of his aphorisms, carries with it some of the impersonality of a mathematical equation: 'Life is the beginning of death. Life is because of death. Death is the ending and the beginning at one and the same time; separation and closer union with self at one and the same time. The reduction is completed by death'.

Novalis was born in 1772, and he had die before the completion of his twenty-ninth year. The piety and gracefulness with which life in his father's house was permeated transmitted to him the fulness of religious strength out of which grew his beautiful *Geistliche Lieder* and his fragmentary novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: for him the poet is priest and interpreter of life, the mediator between man and God, and this concomitance of the temporal and the eternal—as Professor Closs puts it, 'a vision in which the finite is reflected in infinity and the accidental becomes a symbol'—is the inspiring principle of *Hymns to the Night*; they owe as much to his longing to follow his Sophie into the grave as to the 'sweet intoxication' of the 'sacred, inexpressible, mysterious night'.

To attempt a translation of the miraculous order of the *Hymns* into another language is a most ambitious task, and, if for no other reason, Miss Cotterell's English setting, based on a version discovered at the beginning of this century, must be respectfully considered. Unfortunately, no doubt in order to avoid ambiguities as well as be enabled to employ feminine endings, she has used language which gives her translation an unwontedly archaic sound and occasionally leads to slight mistranslations. But it is not my intention here to decry a translation which comes so close to the heart of the original, and, incidentally, an achievement of perseverance on the part of translator and publisher alike, who have made the *Hymns*, which Professor Closs rightly considers to be among the mightiest of European lyrics, available to the English reader. On the contrary, it is to be hoped that this book will send new readers to

Novalis and encourage a complete translation of his works.

Rilke's *Marienleben*, published in 1913 shortly after two of the *Duino Elegies* had been written, was, one feels, the culmination of his preoccupation, traceable in much of his early work, with the emotions of the young girl. Pity for her was the core of his first dramatic attempt; a story in the early volume of sketches, *Am Leben hin*, tells of the wood-carver who carves the features of his beloved when he would create an image of the Madonna; and similarly, a number of cycles (*Gebete der Mädchen zur Maria, Lieder der Mädchen*, etc.) and individual poems all lead to the glorification of the Madonna in *The Life of the Virgin Mary*.

The present translation comes almost uncannily near to giving a correct transcription of the original; that is to say, after a fairly careful study of it I am unable to put my finger on more than two or three words and phrases which do not carry some of the meaning of Rilke's words and phrases. Yet this is as unsatisfactory a translation as one could imagine, for Mr. MacIntyre has fallen into two traps which, all too unconsciously, he has laid for himself in his notes. 'Every man has his own Rilke' is one of his peculiar premises, and the other is contained in what he terms his 'documentation' of the poems, consisting of his 'quoting fully the (biblical) origin of their inspiration'. To him, having his own Rilke has apparently meant justification for casual treatment of the poet's rhythms and metres and rhyme-schemes, and also what one may consider to be the worst crime a translator can commit, namely, to simplify the sense of the poem, to lowers its level until the translation resembles the original as much as, say, an arrangement for Palm Court orchestra resembles the *Eroica*. Mr. McIntyre, in looking upon the *Marienleben* as one of the 'many lives of the Virgin Mary', has employed an American English which at its best recalls the Authorized Version, but would never have been countenanced by Rilke. The result is a conglomeration of infelicities with little more authenticity than a school crib.

Furthermore, his notes contain a great deal of superfluous matter, so that they also cast doubts on his fitness to translate a work of the proportions of the *Marienleben*. I cannot resist quoting the reference he makes to the concluding stanza of *On the Wedding at Cana*: 'I hope I may be forgiven, as a Scot, for having computed that the amount of wine thus produced —and I have taken as an average two and one-half firkins, at the probable English valuation when the King James version was

made—was around 150 gallons, which ought to have been adequate for quite a celebration.

The English version of the *Duino Elegies* made by Mr. Leishman and Mr. Spender has, since its first publication in 1939, come to be considered the standard translation. The new edition contains a number of corrections and improvements. I should like to take the opportunity of drawing attention to another recently published translation of great value, by Miss Ruth Speirs. Serious readers of the *Elegies* would do well to study both.

Should the editor of *Poetry Quarterly* allow the dubious enterprise of sorting poets into religious denominations to be continued in the pages of this magazine, he will find himself in something of a quandary when he comes to squeezing Mr. John Betjeman into such an anthology, or perhaps his real difficulty will lie in finding other poets of merit who, as Mr. John Sparrow neatly puts it, 'worship the Lord in the beauty of ugliness'. For Mr. Betjeman is unique in our time and for whoever discovers him, in that his is truly comic verse, detailed, intense, precise, which never descends to the elaborate and attenuated whimsy to be found in the general run of comic verse. Contrary to Mr. Sparrow—who in his introduction praises him for his increasing seriousness—I am of the opinion that Mr. Betjeman is so captivating a poet because of his ability of delineating truth on topographies and faces where one would never have expected any to exist; because he is poet enough to show, at the time of ridiculing his subjects, that they deserve not to be taken lightly. His eye for detail enables him to reproduce so meticulously his various settings that he appears to be almost omniscient in things nobody else has ever looked at or considered. If however, as Mr. Sparrow insists, even his amatory poems, his *Joan Hunter Dunn* and his *Portable Lieutenant,* are not comic creations, but can, by orderly synopsis, be reduced to ordinary verse, they are nothing and whimsy, and improvements on Mr. A. A. Milne *et al,* only by virtue of Mr. Betjeman's greater ability as a versifier.

The mannered conventions of Mr. Pudney's small, tidy and brassy verses have, after all his preceding volumes ('sales to date exceed 100,000 copies') the appearance of a parade of foregone conclusions. None of them come into conflict with the formula which stood him in good stead in his wartime poems—staccato lines, virile adjectives and occasional slangy phrases, a plethora of public emotions—where slickness was the entire aim. It should be pointed out to Mr. Pudney that the novelty has worn off.

ERNST SIGLER.

The Book of Canadian Poetry, edited by A. J. M. SMITH (Cambridge University Press and University of Chicago Press, 27s. 6d.)

THE first edition of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* was published in 1943 with the principal object of illustrating 'in the light of a contemporary and cosmopolitan literary consciousness the broad development of English-Canadian poetry from its beginnings at the end of the eighteenth century to its renewal of power in the revolutionary world of to-day.' In the second edition there are almost 100 additional poems, including a more representative selection from the work of modern poets, and a number of inconsequential pieces have been replaced by longer poems such as E. J. Pratt's *The Witches Brew* and Patrick Anderson's *Poem on Canada*. Covering as it does the whole field of Canadian poetry—from adaptations of the early Indian songs to the violent sociological poems of Raymond Souster—this anthology is undoubtedly one of the most important volumes of poetry to leave Canada. It is to be regretted that its price will set it beyond the reach of many of those for whom it would have the utmost value.

In his comprehensive introduction Professor A. J. M. Smith is a little too pre-occupied with establishing his theory that there have always been two opposing schools of Canadian poets—the native or national group who have concentrated 'on what is individual and unique in Canadian Life' and the cosmopolitans who have been concerned 'with what it has in common with life everywhere'. He endeavours to convince his readers that it is the latter school upon whom depends the future of Canadian poetry. At its face value this sounds an authoritative judgment and one is inclined to accept it as such. But when he announces that the Extra-Canadian tradition arose first, and attempts to trace the line of development, separating the cosmopolitan sheep from the native goats, down to those moderns who 'are importing something very much needed in their homeland', one suspects that the theory is at least an over-simplification.

The suspicion is confirmed by a study of the poems that follow. The native poets, according to Professor Smith's method of classification, are those who have restricted their vision to the superficial aspects of their environment, and whose most successful work seldom achieves anything more than an exact description of the local scenery, or the flora and fauna. Apparently, to interpret whatever was essentially and distinctively Canadian the poets had

merely to litter their poems with maple leaves and bison-paths, and add occasional references to the ice-rimmed lakes. Any poet who managed to rise above that level is immediately labelled cosmopolitan and a neat little identification-tag attached to his collar (Charles Heavysege—'originality of conception and execution'; Isabella Valancy Crawford—'imaginative and intellectual'; George Frederick Cameron—'classical'). The theory certainly leads to some interesting discoveries when applied to English poetry. And though the professor is honest enough to remark that 'the claim of this poetry (that of the native group) to be truly national . . . must, on the whole, be denied to a body of work which ignored on principle the coarse bustle of humanity in the hurly-burly business of the developing nation', he continues to elaborate upon his previous comments.

The truth is, of course, that a *Canadian* tradition of any kind has never been in existence, as this anthology clearly shows. Until quite recently most Canadian poets, native or cosmopolitan, seem to have suffered from that sense of inferiority peculiar to the colonial outlook. Their work, although ostentatiously concerned with subjects of local or national interest, was modelled to the English or American prototypes of Cowper, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, early Tennyson and Poe. To say that is not to disparage their efforts. The remarkable thing is that, in the difficult circumstances of a colonial environment, they were able to maintain the standards of cratsmanship they did.

Not until the nineteen-thirties is there any real evidence of the development of an essentially Canadian poetry. It is significant that the editor makes no attempt to divide the modern poets into his two categories. With the appearance of F. R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, A. M. Klein, Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay and others, a period of experimental work began which soon produced original poems of quality, and by the early forties the leading Canadian poets were exporting their products (if I may use Professor Smith's language). English and American influences are still to be discerned but not so as to be too obstrusive. Of the youngest generation represented here the most outstanding poets are P. K. Page, Ronald Hambleton, Louis Dudek, and Raymond Souster, the latter adopting a tough colloquial idiom unusual in its effect. It is to such poets as these, rather than to the importers of an external culture, that we shall look for an independent and virile Canadian poetry.

HOWARD SERGEANT.